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ABSTRACT

This study compared the first grade reading comprehension and vocabulary scores of children who were exposed to a Language Experience Approach in kindergarten to the scores of children who participated in a traditional kindergarten reading readiness program. Two groups of 22 students each were matched for sex and for scores on standardized reading readiness tests administered at the end of the kindergarten year. Students in the experimental group had participated in the Language Experience program while students in the control group had participated in the traditional readiness class. Students from both groups were randomly placed into first grade levels and received reading instruction through a basal reading program. The Gates-MacGintie Test, Primary Form A, was administered to all students at the end of first grade. Scores from the comprehension and vocabulary sections of the test were used to compare the reading progress of the experimental and control groups. Results indicated significantly higher scores on both subtests for the students who were exposed to the Language Experience program. The results suggested that the Language Experience program should be continued and should be expanded to include all kindergarten students. (BD)

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SUPPORTIVE EVIDENCE FOR THE LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE APPROACH AT THE KINDERGARTEN LEVEL.....

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Abstract

This study presents a follow-up on the effect of the Language Experience Approach as a reading readiness technique with kindergarten pupils. Comparisons were made on vocabulary and comprehension development with two groups of first graders. The first group was exposed to the Language Experience Approach following the concept that a student can say what he/she thinks, write what he/she can say (or have someone else write it for him/her), read what is written, and have others read the same. The second group served as the standard control functionary subjected to traditional readiness methodology including commercially prepared workbooks, pictures, art supplies, and the Dolch List(20).

Students were paired on the basis of sex and standard reading readiness raw scores with twenty-two in each group. A t-test was employed to compare the results.

The results supported both hypotheses indicating the benefit of a reading readiness program incorporating the functional framework of a total language process.

Introduction

Statement of the Problem:

There is a significant difference between the first grade achievement of students participating in the Language Experience Approach to reading during kindergarten as compared to those students who participated in a regular Kindergarten Readiness program.

Hypotheses:

1) Kindergarten children taught by the Language Experience Approach to reading will attain a significantly higher degree of vocabulary skills than children taught by the regular Kindergarten Reading Readiness program.

2) Kindergarten children taught by the Language Experience Approach to reading will attain a significantly higher degree of comprehension skills than children taught by the regular Kindergarten Reading Readiness program.

Definition of Terms:

Language Experience Approach--The Language Experience Approach to teaching reading readiness follows the concept that the student can say what he/she thinks, write what he/she can say (or have someone write it for him/her), read what is written, and have others read the same. Topics are discussed as they arise, displayed in the lesson in the language pattern of the student as he/she dictates, and read by the student immediately following his/her dictation.

Standard Kindergarten Reading Readiness Approach--The standard reading readiness approach relies heavily upon the use of pictures, readiness workbooks, art supplies, and approximately fifteen basic words from the Dolch List(20).

Countless hours of philosophical discussion often surround the issue of when "Johnny" should begin the process of integrating the printed word into meaningful thought units--reading.

Some are aligned with the "leave well enough alone" viewpoint whereby preschool children should not encounter any formal reading instruction until first grade when their teacher proclaims, "Take good care of this book, children. This is your basal reader!"

Sheldon (49), for example, in his analysis of reading studies directly involving the kindergarten child, not only examines early childhood approaches in public school systems within the United States, but also encounters the Montessori method in Great Britain and even Soviet kindergarten readiness approaches. From the research gathered, he concludes, ". . . there seems to be little or no justification for introducing reading into the curriculum at the kindergarten or five-year-old stage." (1962, p. 168)

Hymes (36) also appears to support the "anti" argument by commenting on early formal reading methodology in an allegorical manner. In this approach, kindergarten teachers are compared to quizmasters whose T.V. approach with new gimmicks, machines, alphabets, and words in color make ". . . learning to read a sterile un-intellectual act, with baby-like content." (1965, p. 88)

In concluding her analysis of whether or not reading should be taught in the kindergarten, Smith (52) reflects: "Thus it is that the kindergarten teacher has a responsibility in reading development--not in teaching classes of children with a basal reader but in providing abundant contacts with reading symbols in meaningful situations. This is her function in developing the reading facet of child growth." (1964, p. 8)

Other educators like Durkin (21) and Brzeinski, Harrison, and McKee(11) maintain that an actual need exists at the kindergarten level for reading instruction--a need that requires immediate attention.

Brzeinski, Harrison, and McKee (11) in their report on the Denver Experiment, a study employing contextual referencing, letter sounds, and combination sounds for twenty minutes each day with kindergarten children, contend that early reading in kindergarten could ". . . be effectively taught to large numbers. . . with no evidence found that early instruction in beginning reading affected visual acuity, created problems of school adjustment, or caused dislike for reading." (1967, p. 25)

Durkin's (21) pioneering efforts culminate in the field of early reading by issuing the following charge: "If kindergartens, as a whole, are to avoid both boredom and frustration, and if they are to build on the abilities the children bring to school, then at least some kindergarten programs should offer opportunities to learn to read, either because the children arrive with the beginnings of reading ability or because, over time, they can show an interest in learning." (1964, p. 5)

It is not the purpose of this study to place the reader in one armed camp or another, but simply to examine a reading technique that cannot be easily pigeonholed, either as "formal reading instruction" or "non-structured, open-ended readiness." It is a method hailed by the progressive for its spontaneity and yet condemned by them for its lack of continuity, praised by the traditional for its simplistic practicality and attacked for its inability to control vocabulary.

In studying the instructional needs of the kindergarten pupil as he/she relates to the readiness aspect of the reading process, Anderson (5); Walcutt, Lamport, and McCracken (57); Cutts (18); Burns and Broman (12); and Dallmann, Rouch, Chang, and Deboer (19) all provide some basic considerations.

Anderson presents several common factors needed for the promotion of readiness: broad rich experience, vocabulary development, the ability to attend (stories, completion of work, participation), seeing and hearing likeness and difference, organizing thought in sequence, being able to classify and generalize, the ability to follow instructions, the ability to speak clearly, the ability to draw conclusions, the ability to recall details, and interest in books and experience of others.

In their introduction to the "Kindergarten Year," Walcutt, Lamport, and McCracken (57) place verbal readiness in parity with physical readiness by stating, "Without sacrificing social and creative activities, a kindergarten class should have as part of its program specific training in gross and fine motor skills, in auditory and visual discrimination and the subskills that lead to their development and in the verbal experiences necessary for language and concept growth." (1974, p. 102)

Cutts (18) analyzes reading readiness with greater emphasis upon the oral aspect of the kindergarten child's total language development. The following incorporates a few of his major instructional factors influencing the readiness for formal reading:

1. Many varied opportunities for oral expression.
2. Discussing experiences or things shared by others.
3. Keeping records of words that have been of interest to the group.

4. Arranging the classroom for individual and group experience to encourage self reliance.
5. Field trips and other excursions, preceded by preparedness directions followed by a discussion, experience charts, and critique.

In a similar vein, Burns and Broman (12) contend that since "reading is related to all language functions, and learning to read is built upon past language experience. . . it is virtually impossible to overemphasize the relationship between a child's language facility and learning to read." (1975, p. 492)

Dallmann, Rouch, Chang, and Deboer (19) have composed several interesting guidelines for readiness activities. Of particular note is the following step:

> The activities of the prereading period should provide background for the initial reading tasks--unfortunately, the usual reading textbooks written for the child population as a whole do not take account of the many variations in the social, cultural, geographical, and vocational backgrounds of all children. The characters and situations portrayed in most reading textbooks are therefore, usually drawn from the environment of fairly typical middle class homes and communities. Preparing the children for the basal reading series can therefore be a formidable task.
>
> A rich experience program in the prereading period will provide the foundation on which the initial reading may be built. (1974, pp. 70-71)

Ponder, for a minute, the following instructional needs for readiness:

--a rich experience and ability to recall experiences of others

--verbal experiences necessary for language and concept growth

--opportunities for oral expression, discussing experiences shared by others, excursions followed by experience charts

--learning to read is built upon past language experience

--the need for a rich experience program due to the lack of local variation in reading textbooks

In light of the above, reflect upon the basic nature of the Language Experience Approach. Following a stimulating oral discussion on a topic of general interest (a field trip, the first day of snow, or even the teacher's new boyfriend),

the class dictates a short story written verbatim by the teacher on a chart or overhead projector. Frequent interval breaks provide for choral or individual rereading and a personalized pre-primer has been created. For those who are ready, there are word banks, phrase cards, rhyming words, and letter games. For those who are not ready, there is the joy of the verbal contribution to a group project and the feeling of belonging to the group--important in beginning reading.

Although much theoretical literature has been written concerning the method of teaching the Language Experience Approach, relatively little technical research has been compiled to establish its benefit over reading readiness.

It is the opinion of the authors of this study that research in this field has been long overdue. The findings should serve to indicate that further large scale research analysis is warranted.

The implications herein, although valid for the population concerned, should not be construed to be applicable to the total population. Again, contentions exist that further research should be conducted on a large scale basis to determine the effectiveness of a Language Experience Approach to readiness instruction.

Description, Research Design, and Procedures

Description of Subjects

Students selected for this experimental study were chosen on the basis of their scores on standardized reading readiness tests administered at the completion of kindergarten. These scores, coupled with the factors of sex, provided the basis for matched pairing.

The experimental group members consisted of twenty-two kindergarten students chosen because of their ability to verbally interact well. They were also exposed to the Language Experience method of reading. The control group numbered the same, but received the Standard Kindergarten Reading Readiness Approach.

The Gates-Mac Ginitie Reading Test of Readiness Skills was employed to obtain standard readiness scores. The Gates-Mac Ginitie Reading Test, Primary A, was used to obtain vocabulary and comprehension scores. A t-test for paired data was used to compare the results.

Research Design and Procedures

Students were paired on the basis of sex and standard readiness scores with twenty-two in each group. The standard readiness scores were exact in one half of the pairings and fluctuated by only one point in the remaining half.

At the conclusion of the first grade, the vocabulary and comprehension test was administered. Scores were then compared via a t-test for paired data.

Findings

Since our study incorporated twenty-one degrees of freedom (N-1), the appropriate level of significance at .05 was 1.721. The resulting t scores of 2.065 and 2.338 (vocabulary and comprehension respectively) were statistically significant, thus supporting our hypotheses.

Summary and Conclusions

The hypotheses state that kindergarten children who received readiness instruction through the Language Experience Approach would attain a significantly higher degree of vocabulary and comprehension skills than those children who received readiness instruction through a regular Kindergarten Reading Readiness program.

The method employed consisted of pairing students in conjunction with the type of readiness instruction received. Each of the twenty-two students in the experimental group who received the Language Experience Approach as readiness instruction was paired with a student who possessed a similar score and sex type in the control group who received readiness instruction through the regular Kindergarten Reading Readiness program. Students from both groups were randomly placed into first grade levels and administered reading instruction through a basal reading program. Upon completion of one year of instruction at the first grade level, all students were tested with the Gates-Mac Ginitie, Primary Form A. Standard scores on vocabulary and comprehension were compared by utilizing the t-test for paired data.

The computations measured by the t-test reported a significantly higher score than those indicated in the distribution t table. This provides a basis for defining a significant difference between the experimental and control group's vocabulary and comprehension skills.

In conclusion, children who learn via a Language Experience Approach in a kindergarten readiness program possess higher vocabulary and comprehension skills at the completion of the first grade than those who received instruction through the methods of a regular Kindergarten Reading Readiness program.

This research study supports the implication that continuation of teaching language arts readiness in the kindergarten level should be maintained. It is suggested that the readiness program of Language Experience Approach should be continued and expanded to reach all students.

TABLE I

MEANS and t VALUE for VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT SCORES of EXPERIMENTAL versus CONTROL GROUP

	$\bar{X}$	N	t	P
EXPER.	61.36 ~~61.40~~	22		
CONTROL	54.68	22	2.065	.05

TABLE II

MEANS and t VALUE for COMPREHENSION DEVELOPMENT SCORES of EXPERIEMENTAL versus CONTROL GROUP

	$\bar{X}$	N	t	P
EXPER.	61.40	22		
CONTROL	56.13	22	2.338	.05

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